

Oral history with Wayne Aspinall, Colorado. (Transcription)

Start M10 A(1)

A.L All right, now, you went to the University of Denver. And what did you do there?

W.A. Well, I went there as a young kid from the country. I had a scholarship for the first semester, a church scholarship...

A.L. What kind of a scholarship?

W.A. A church scholarship. It's a Methodist school....

A.L. Oh, I see.

W.A. ...so they gave us the start. I went over with my present wife's first husband, <gap> who was a resident of Palisade and Grand Junction. I remember when we went over the preacher bought us a Pullman and both of us slept in the upper berth of the Pullman car.

A.L. They were a little crowded...

W.A. A little crowded but we didn't pay any attention to that. That was our first time in a Pullman. And I immediately began to get work. I got all kinds of work, taking care of

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furnaces, taking care of yards, calcimining kitchens, beating carpets, washing blackboards. And I worked my way through the University of Denver.

A.L. All four years?

W.A. All four years.

A.L. Now, tell us a little bit about that train, that Pullman train. You don't see those much any more.

W.A. This was the old Midland Railroad....

A.L. Still on the Midland.

W.A. Still on the Midland. This was before the First World War, when they discontinued the Midland. And it was a rather dirty ride, course, because they were coal-driven engines and in the upper part of the car, of course, the coal smoke sifted in.

A.L. Any cinders?

W.A. There weren't any cinders in the Pullman cars. There were plenty of cinders in the other cars. That was one of the good things about riding the Pullman..(laughs) in those days. They couldn't

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(W.A.) keep the smoke out. And they were slow, of course. And in those days the passenger train stopped at Grand Junction and Palisade and Cameo and DeBeque and Rifle and right on all the way through and that made a slow ride to Denver.

A.L. It stopped at every point along the road.

W.A. That's exactly right.

A.L. To Denver. Now, what about the athletics? Did you enter athletics in D.U.?

W.A. I continued with my work in athletics. I entered in basketball that fall. I didn't enter into any football until the following fall. My football at the University of Denver was rather short-lived as far as that's concerned because I only weighed 155 pounds and in those days it was all on the ground and although I was fairly fast for a boy, I nevertheless I couldn't take the crunching from the big ones. So I never got on the first team but on basketball I played right along with the men and got to be a substitute on the basketball team.

A.L. Let's go back to football for a minute. Wasn't it first down and five yards to go then instead of...

W.A. Oh, I can't remember, Al. All I remember Was that when you had 200 and 225 pounders against you it was pure force and...

A.L. That's right, that's the kind of football it was in those, days.

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W.A. And the only thing that I could do was if I was fast enough, I played fullback, I could get behind my blocker why, usually I could go all right but when it came to defense work at fullback they carried me right on back.

A.L. That was another thing, there wasn't any such thing as a defense team....

W.A. That's right, it was all the same team.

A.L. Yeah. Okay, now, let's go on a little bitwhat did you study there?

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W.A. My majors at the University of Denver were preparatory to law, I'd already made up my mind that I wanted to study law so I had political science and history. And I had my minors in German and biology. I remember very distinctly when I finished my first year. I was called in by my mathematics teacher, a new Englander, who had taken care of trying to teach me trigonometry and solid geometry and college algebra. He called me in and he said, "Now, Mr. Aspinall, You've got all of your mathematics out of the way except two hours." He said, "I know what you've done. You're getting your required work out of the way so you won't have to be bothered with that later on." And I said, "That's right, <gap>" He said, "Well, you don't like mathematics." And I said, "Oh yes, I do, <gap>" And he said, "Oh no, you don't." He said, "It's not of any interest to you. You get your grades every day but you don't have any interest in it like you do in history." And I argued with him but he finally convinced me that.. he said, "I could teach you calculus and I could teach you astronomy and you'd pass it, but," he said, "it would be terrible for you and it'd be worse for me." So I said, "All right." And he said, "Now, I teach a little course how to teach arithmetic, two hours, just like you need." (laugh) He said, "I guarantee that you can pass the course

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and you don't even have to crack a book, you don't even have to attend class." (laughter) And this is the way that I got my mathematics in the University of Denver. But believe it or not, Al, I came out of the University of Denver with what later on turned out to be a Phi Beta Kappa key. (laugh) So I wasn't dumb, I just didn't like mathematics. (laughter)

A.L. (laughing) For the benefit of the "unwashed" a Phi Beta Kappa key is the highest grade that you can get in college. Okay. Then

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(A.L.) you graduated from college and then what did you do?

W.A. Well, I was in the Class of 1918 which should have graduated then but in the spring of '17, six days after the war was declared with the Germans I left school and tried to get into the cavalry and couldn't make it and went home. And signed up for the signal corps of the United States Army preparatory to flying. Accordingly I spent my next 13 months in the service and I was discharged a flying cadet 16 days after the Armistice was signed. So I didn't graduate until 1919. I got my AB and then I came home, I taught some school, I got married and then I didn't go back to law school until 1922.

A.L. By the way, who did you marry?

W.A. I married <gap> who had lived in Palisade with her family in 1912 and 13 and had moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, and I married her in Lincoln, Neb. And we have four children. Of course, she left me in 1969.

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A.L. She died?

W.A. Yes, she died.

A.L. That was <gap>

W.A. <gap>

A.L. <gap> Okay. All right, so you got married and then what?

W.A. Well, then I bought a peach ranch, we both taught school for one year and then I sold the peach ranch. I made enough money to go to law school so I went back to Denver, Denver Law School....

A.L. That was Denver University?

W.A. The Denver College of Law, University of Denver. It's part of the University of Denver. And I got a job in the law firm of what had been <gap> and <gap> Governor Gunther had been governor in 1917 and 18 but because he was a Southerner and because of the Ku Klux Klan coming into position and a few other things

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(W.A.) he didn't get the nomination. <gap> Hynan <gap> got the nomination, and if you remember the history Oliver Shute Was elected on the Republican ticket.

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A.L. Oh, that was after 1918 because the Ku Klux Klan came in here when I was here.

W.A. Yeah, but the Ku Klux Klan was already in...

A.L. In Colorado.

W.A. Coming into Colorado.

A.L. Did you ever join them?

W.A. Oh, no. My father and I didn't but my brother did and he only attended one meeting. (laugh) And that was enough for him!

A.L. Okay, now you're in the law firm.

W.A. Well, I was working in the law firm of Lindsey and Laurville in Denver and I worked there until I graduated in 1925. Then I was offered a position to stay with that firm but I didn't care for that kind o of work in the city. That wasn't what I was after. I was also offered a job by the late....well, he was the leader of the Denver Chamber of Commerce and the Colorado Chamber of Commerce, a lawyer, a water lawyer...his name will come to me pretty soon.... I was offered a job with the Colorado Chamber of Commerce to just take care of water matters....

A.L. And stay in Denver.

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W.A. And stay in Denver. But I didn't want any of that either, so I came on over here and I was 29 years of age. I started a little law practice at Palisade. I brought a classmate with me, the firm of Aspinall and Roepnack and we....

A.L. How do you spell Roepnack?

W.A. R-o-e-p-n-a-c-k. And we carried on until 1929 when we had a doctor fight up at Palisade and....

A.L. <gap>

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W.A. That was Dr.<gap>. And I stayed with....

A.L. How do you spell

W.A. <gap> My partner went with the other side. We weren' supposed to have anything to do with any criminal practice of <gap> but we were his lawyers in civil matters and other matters. So that broke up the partnership. I had no more partnership until I started a partnership with my son in 1973.

A.L. I see. Well, tell us a little bit about Dr.

W.A. Well, <gap> was an old country practitioner. He was just a family practitioner. He took over the practice of a Dr. Tadlock up at Palisade and he practiced all over the county.

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Some people thought that he wasn't as well educated as some of the other doctors. On the other hand he had a very fine service, had a lot of parishoners. He'd do anything for them. He wasn't the kind of a doctor that we have today. You can't get this kind o of doctors any more.

A.L. As I understood he didn't even have a doctor's certificate, that is, he....

W.A. Oh, yes, he did.

A.L. Well, I'd heard that and...

W.A. He had the same kind of a doctor's certificate, a doctor's license as <gap> or <gap> or <gap> He passed a fair examination of the state board.

A.L. <gap> was in Collbran wasn't he?

W.A. Yes, <gap> was in Collbran.

A.L. Okay, let's go on.

W.A. Well, <gap> as I said he was a family doctor and he had some critics, just like every other doctor. And he got into this trouble in Palisade. And I won't go into that any more but it

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(W.A.) split the community apart, at that time. It helped me a great deal when I ran for my first state job in 1930 because <gap> friends were all over this county and I had stayed with <gap> I had gotten Attorneys <gap> and <gap> to take his case before the board over in Denver and went over there with him. <gap> lost his license for six months, it was suspended but not because he didn't have preparation but it was because of the fact that he did have a diploma that he'd gotten from some darn diploma mill in California. And this worked against him.

A.L. Okay, so you went on your own as a lawyer.

W.A. That's right, and also I was then in partnership with my father in a 50-acre peach orchard development over on Orchard Mesa. And we kept that until he passed away and I went to Congress. And I found out that a person couldn't run a peach orchard from 2000 miles away so I sold the peach orchard.

A.L. I see. Didn't you have an office in Grand Junction?

W.A. After this difficulty I had with my first partner then I went back and bought everything he had, two years later, for \$120. All the books that he'd had and the furniture and what few clients he had left because he lost out. And I stayed up there until 1933. I was teaching school at this time, too, I was teaching school, running the school bus, a member of the town board, practicing the law. I remember one of our handicapped people up at Palisades told my wife the trouble with <gap> is he's trying to hog it all. (laughs) Well, anyhow, 1933 when the Democrats came into power and the school warrants were being discounted and the salaries were being reduced, I was offered a position as district council

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of the Home Owner's Loan Corporation. This was when <gap> who was your former boss, and <gap> and others were,

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(W.A.) you know, were representing Colorado in that new administration, Democratic administration. So I became the district council for the Home Owner's Loan Corporation. And that was what I did until 1934. In 1934 I was told that the rules wouldn't let me be a state representative and hold this office at the same time. So I decided that I had to support my family so I wouldn't run for state representative the next time, and then they discontinued the office of district council of the Home Owner's Loan Corporation about three days after the primary so then I had to go ahead and get back to the practice of law and do some lobbying in the State Legislature. I represented the Continental Oil Company and....

A.L. As a lobbyist.

W.A. As a lobbyist for 1935 and 36. In 1936 then I ran again for the state legislature and was elected, decided to re-establish my law office down here in Grand Junction and in 1941 the war came on and I gave up my law office in 1943 to enter World War II. And gave my practice to one of the present residents of Grand Junction who took care of it very nicely. And then I came back from the war and I started another law practice in Palisade and Grand Junction and then I was elected to Congress and I had to give that up.

A.L. All right, now you're elected to Congress...we're getting way ahead of ourselves here now. Let's go back away. You mentioned <gap> Tell us a little bit about <gap> He was quite a character.

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W.A. <gap> of course, was one of the finest men I ever knew.

A.L. I'll agree to that.

W.A. He was a Southerner. He was more or less conservative. He was a trained politician. He wasn't very friendly toward my bid for office in 1926 when I wanted to be nominated for the State House of Representatives. And I didn't get the nomination. In 1928 I

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